

## Visual Preference Survey Findings - Signage

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The Department of Planning Conservation and Development conducted a survey to get a sense of the aesthetic preferences of people who live, work or visit Middletown. A Visual Preference Survey is a limited tool and it has its flaws, mostly because you ask people to provide subjective response to something that provides only limited information, *a picture of a sign*. However, we believe that the results can be helpful to starting a discussion that can guide further investigation.

67 responses were received through the online survey form after soliciting people to participate through the department's weekly email newsletter, asking professional planners throughout the State to participate through a planners email listserve.

There were a total of 100 photos of signs which can be found in various towns in Connecticut. The signs varied between building signs and free standing signs. Each sign has unique characteristics which makes it either aesthetically "attractive" or "unattractive" to an individual. The scores are based on a first impression of the photograph of the sign.

The signs were broken down by their characteristics including size/height, illumination, number of signs, placement/landscaping, shape, symmetry and material. This breakdown allows us to see which combination of characteristics is most and least aesthetically pleasing.

Within the top 10 signs there is only one free standing sign, the rest being signs directly attached to a building. It is surprising that while there is only one free standing sign, it is actually tied for the top scoring spot. In the remaining nine signs of the 10 highest ranked, six of them extrude from the building either through a canopy or by hanging on a pole, the rest lay flat against the building facade.

Of the 10 lowest scoring signs nine of them are free standing, not attached to a building. These include multi-tenant plaza signs as well as single tenant signs. The only picture with building signs has multiple signs placed at different stories of the building which may attribute to its low score.

### Characteristic Breakdown

Overall *building signs* had a much higher average rating than *free standing signs*, which is apparent in the highest and lowest scoring categories. *Building signs* had an average score of 5.7 and *free standing sign* an average score of 4.3.

Building signs that are smaller, *less than 40% frontage*, had a higher average rating, 6.1, than signs larger than *40% of frontage*. It is interesting to see that signs that are *over 60% frontage* actually had a higher average score than those between *40% and 60%* but lower than the smallest signs.

When looking at the height of free standing signs shorter signs were more popular than the signs *over 12'*. This is not surprising due to the sheer size of these signs as they may be too large for their surroundings. Smaller (*less than 8'*) signs rated significantly higher, 5.0, than signs *over 12'* which has an average score of 3.2. While there is a difference in height preference these signs are not popular as a whole.

Illumination is an interesting characteristic. Externally illuminated signs rated much higher, 5.9, than internally illuminated signs, 4.8. While this makes sense it is interesting to see that signs that are *not illuminated* at all have a higher rating, 5.5, than signs with internal illumination, 4.8.

The average scores for photos with multiple signs versus a single sign did not vary much. Single signs did score higher but only by 0.3 points. Multi-sign photos typically included free standing signs which are not as pleasing by themselves.

When focusing on the different types of building signs there is a higher preference for signs which extrude and hang from a wall than for flat building signs. Hanging signs are the most popular with an average score of 7.0 and extruding signs just below that at 6.4. Signs which are flat against a building's façade scored the lowest with an average score of 5.4.

Free standing signs are often located near the street in front of a building. Comparing the landscaping aspects of these signs showed little preference. One surprising difference is that being placed in a bare lawn scores slightly higher than with plantings, 4.8 and 4.2 respectively. A sign placed directly on pavement scored the lowest, 4.0. This aspect might have not played a major role in the quick scoring of the photos.

Building signs which are located over doorways scored lower than those not located over doorways. Again this aspect might not have been an important characteristic with a first response score.

Comparing the shape of signs showed an interesting trend. The *Other* category, which only had two signs, scored the highest, 6.4. This category included a diamond shaped sign and a free standing sculpture type sign. The second highest scoring category for shape was *lettering/logo*, 5.9. There were many of this type of sign, which usually consisted of the business name with a logo either preceding or following the text. This might be because it is easily recognizable as compared to *rectangular* signs which had the next highest score, 5.2. *Oval* signs had the lowest average score of 4.7.

Symmetry was an interesting category in that *asymmetrical* signs had a higher average score than *symmetrical* signs. This is surprising in *symmetrical* is usually preferred and easier on the eyes. A reason this might be is because *lettering/logo* signs are preferred and are usually *asymmetrical*.

The material category varied widely in that the *Other* category, which consisted of glass or fabric such as on a canopy or awning scored the highest with an average score of 6.7. Wood scored second highest, 6.2; metal third at 5.0 and plastic was the lowest with an average score of 4.8. This is not surprising in that most *plastic* signs had a lower visual appearance than those of *metal*, *wood*, or *other*.

## 10 Highest Scores

1.) Photo 28 – Holy Trinity



2) Photo 19 – Burger Joint



3) Photo 31 – Little Tibet



4) Photo 55 – Prime Steakhouse



5) Photo 57 – McVane



## 10 Lowest Scores

8.1 100) Photo 41- DM



2.3

8.1 99) Photo 42 – Middletown Plaza



2.7

7.7 98) Photo 99 – Visual Perceptions



2.9

7.5 97) Photo 23 – McDonald's



3.0

7.5 96) Photo 58 – Bruce's



3.3

6) Photo 80 – White House



7) Photo 33 – Daswani



8) Photo 76 – Mezzo Grill



9) Photo 15 – G.W. Crane



10) Photo 35 – Luce



7.5 95) Photo 14 – CVS



7.5 94) Photo 97 – Main/Washington 3.3



7.3 93) Photo 3 – Home Depot 3.4



7.2 92) Photo 85 – Midas 3.4



7.1 91) Photo 48 – Hair Unlimited 3.4





## Type

	Count	Average Score
Building Signs	75	5.7
Free Standing Signs	25	4.3

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## Size – Building Signs

	Count	Average Score
Less than 40% Frontage	21	6.1
40%-60% Frontage	35	5.3
Over 60% Frontage	19	5.6

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## Height – Free Standing Signs

	Count	Average Score
Less than 8'	11	5.0
8' to 12'	6	4.4
Over 12'	8	3.2

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## Illumination

	Count	Average Score
Non-Illuminated	53	5.5
External	20	5.9
Internal	27	4.8

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## Number of Signs

	Count	Average Score
Multiple Signs	32	5.2
Single Sign	68	5.5

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## Style – Building Signs

	Count	Average Score
Extruding	16	6.4
Hanging	4	7.0
Wall	55	5.4

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## Landscaping – Free Standing Signs

	Count	Average Score
Landscaped Plantings	15	4.2
Lawn	5	4.8
Pavement	5	4.0

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## Placement – Building Signs

	Count	Average Score
Over Doorway	56	5.6
Not Over doorway	5	6.1

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## Shape

	Count	Average Score
Lettering/Logo	32	5.9
Oval	5	4.7
Rectangle	61	5.2
Other	2	6.4

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## Symmetry

	Count	Average Score
Symmetrical	68	5.3
Asymmetrical	32	5.6

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## Material

	Count	Average Score
Metal	5	5.0
Plastic	61	4.8
Wood	20	6.2
Other	14	6.7